

Torbay Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Romana Young
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Date of last inspection	1 January 1900

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Torbay Council has established a private fostering arrangements service to undertake its statutory duties and functions with regard to safeguarding children and young people who are being privately fostered and promoting awareness of the notification requirements. The private fostering arrangements service is based in the same office as Torbay Council's fostering and adoption services. The private fostering service is managed by the fostering service manager and the children's residential services operations manager. There is a designated officer, the private fostering development worker, who undertakes the majority of the required assessment and monitoring visits. In the year up to 31 March 2007, Torbay Council received 73 notifications of which 23% involved adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents who are resident in this country, 19% involved children from overseas whose parents are not resident in this country and 58% involved children who attend language schools. At the time of the inspection visit, there were 13 young people, aged between 11 and 15 years, being cared for in a private fostering arrangement in the Torbay area.

Summary

This is the first inspection of Torbay Council's private fostering arrangements service against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, which came into force on 1 July 2005. This was an announced key inspection. All seven National Minimum Standards were inspected and judged to be met. The inspector found that the private fostering arrangements service is now well established and provides a good service to children and young people being cared for in private fostering arrangements, private foster carers and parents.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Since the introduction of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations in 2005, Torbay Council has taken appropriate action to raise awareness of the notification requirements in its area. In 2005 and 2006, in partnership with the other local authorities in the South West, the local authority produced and distributed publicity materials and mounted a media campaign to highlight the new notification requirements and the need to safeguard the welfare of children and young people not living with a parent or close relative. Torbay Council has also added an informative web-page on private fostering to its web-site. This includes forms to use when making a notification. Information and training about the new legislation and notification requirements has also been provided for local authority staff and other groups of professionals, for example, in health and education, who, in the course of their work, come into contact with children who are, or may

be, being privately fostered. The local authority has appointed a private fostering development worker who responds to notifications relating to overseas students who will be, or are, living with local families for 28 days or more. Other notifications are initially dealt with by the local authority's Children In Need team (intake service). Generally, the systems in place for responding to notifications, and for subsequent visits to be made in accordance with the regulations, are working well. However, the volume of notifications has a distinct seasonal variation, with a high volume of notifications being received between May and September each year, from the large number language schools in the area. This has proved difficult for the local authority to predict and manage. For example, on one occasion, 19 notifications were received on one day. At these times, it is not possible for the private fostering development worker to undertake all the subsequent visits within seven working days from receipt of a notification. The local authority has responded to this by assigning additional resources on an ad-hoc basis. However, this strategy has not ensured that all initial visits have been undertaken within the required timescale. As this seasonal demand on the service is likely to continue, an action plan is needed to ensure that visits can always be undertaken in accordance with the regulations and a recommendation has been made. There is a comprehensive and established procedure in place to determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations. Reports produced are comprehensive and cover all the matters required. There are procedures in place for dealing with situations where the local authority is not satisfied that a private fostering arrangement, or proposed private fostering arrangement, will satisfactorily safeguard or promote the child or young person's welfare. The private fostering development worker provides good advice and support to privately fostered children and young people, private foster carers and parents. Children and young people are provided with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) booklet about private fostering and know how to get in touch with the private fostering development worker. Private foster carers and parents are provided with good information about notification requirements and relevant services.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Torbay Council has produced a written statement, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which these will be carried out. The private fostering development worker is responsible for raising awareness of notification requirements as well as undertaking statutory visiting and reporting roles. The private fostering development worker has made good initial links with other local authority private fostering arrangements services and national organisations, to ensure that local knowledge and practice is current and well-grounded. The private fostering arrangements service has close links and very good working relationships with Torbay Council's Children in Need service and the Safeguarding Manager. This ensures that the needs of privately fostered children and young people are being suitably assessed and addressed. The private fostering development worker provides good advice and

training about private fostering for the local authority's social work staff at induction and on a regular basis, for example, at team meetings. The service has good links with other local services, such as health, housing and education, so that other relevant professionals and local authority staff have access to information and training about their role in ensuring that the local authority is notified about private fostering arrangements in its area. The private fostering development worker also liaises well with local education and health services to assist privately fostered children and young people to access services they need. Records are comprehensive, well-maintained and cover the matters detailed in the private fostering National Minimum Standards and regulations. There are satisfactory systems in place to monitor the way in which the local authority is discharging its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The local authority reports annually to the Local Safeguarding Children Board chairperson on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that an action plan to deal with seasonal demand on the service is in place so that initial regulatory visits are always undertaken within seven working days of the receipt of a notification of a private fostering arrangement, or a proposed private fostering arrangement. (National Minimum Standard 2, Regulations 4 and 7 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations) 2005).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area (NMS 2)
- the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted. (NMS 3)
- private foster carers and parents of privately fostered children receive advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children; privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 4)
- the local authority identifies and provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area (NMS 5)
- children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives (NMS 6).

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 1)
- the local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering (NMS 7).

Ofsted considers 1 and 7 the key standards to be inspected.